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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7155
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9371
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 1899
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 2907
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 0207
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 8249
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 019124

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: PAKISTAN ELECTIONS (4): THE UNIFORM

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 19121
[1](#)B. ISLAMABAD 19122
[1](#)C. ISLAMABAD 19123

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Peter W. Bodde,
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) This cable, the fourth in a series mapping the political terrain as Pakistan approaches nationwide elections in 2007, reviews a uniquely Pakistani issues that will color the run-up to presidential, provincial and federal parliamentary elections: whether President Musharraf will relinquish his post as Chief of Army Staff before seeking re-election as President. Subsequent installments will consider Musharraf's coalition options and recommendations for U.S. assistance and political support for credible and open elections.

[1](#)2. (C) To the dismay of most Pakistani democracy activists and opposition politicians, for seven years, Pervez Musharraf has remained Chief of Army Staff (COAS) while serving as Pakistan's Chief Executive and President. Whether Musharraf must retire from the Army before seeking re-election as President is a frequent topic of debate by Pakistan's intelligentsia, as "the uniform" symbolizes both Musharraf's core source of power and the military's recurrent domination of the Pakistani body politic.

[1](#)3. (C) Many Pakistani political analysts believe that Musharraf is constitutionally barred both from (a) continuing to serve concurrently as COAS and President beyond 2007 and (b) seeking re-election to another term as President. The first interpretation stems from the 17th Amendment to Pakistan's Constitution, which specifically extended the time that Musharraf may hold both offices until 2007. The second rests upon a constitutional prohibition against Army officers serving as elected federal officials until two years after retiring from military service.

[1](#)4. (C) Attorney General Makhdoom Ali Khan and other GOP legal minds have offered alternative readings of the Constitutional imperatives and prohibitions; not

surprisingly, their readings have not persuaded Musharraf's opponents. A case now pending before the Supreme Court may lead to a ruling on the uniform issue, but the Court will be subject to intense pressure to rule in favor of the President. The Government of Pakistan (GOP) could bypass the Supreme Court and extend Musharraf's dual office role through legislation. It would be difficult for the government to pass a constitutional amendment to surmount barriers to Musharraf serving another term as president, given its slim majority; privately, however, leaders of the PPP and PML-N have indicated significant flexibility on this issue if Musharraf retires as COAS.

15. (C) Conversations with presidential advisors and family members lead post to conclude that Musharraf is inclined to relinquish his Army billet. Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Secretary General of the governing Pakistan Muslim League

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(PML), has told post that Musharraf sought his counsel more than a year ago on what is locally known as the "uniform issue." Hussain prepared a two-page written recommendation for Musharraf's personal review. The President subsequently called Hussain to an intimate meeting joined by National Security Advisor Tariq Aziz, whom the President had separately tasked to draft his own a two-page paper. According to Hussein, Musharraf said that he was uncertain about the best way forward: even his family was divided on the issue, with his daughter telling him to take off the uniform, his son urging him to keep it. As it turned out, both Hussein and Aziz gave him the same advice: the uniform should go.

16. (C) Whatever his private inclinations, whether Musharraf

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retires as COAS will depend on political developments over the next year. Post expects that he will defer this decision until late in the process, possibly after parliamentary elections, to avoid becoming a lame duck in the interim and creating an potentially unstable political environment. Given the concentration of power in the Office of the President over the recent years, even without his uniform, President Musharraf would retain far more power and influence than any of his civilian predecessors.

BODDE